

Stream – of -Consciousness technique as recording the multifarious thoughts and feelings of a character with reference to L.S.Ramamirtham’s novel *Abitha* : An Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the ‘Stream-of-Consciousness’ technique employed in the novel *Abitha*, the style reveals the nature and the intention of the writer. He has employed the stream-of-consciousness technique in many of his works, and the incidents are presented through the consciousness of the characters, the inner realities and the evolution of character is given best expression through the stream of consciousness technique. L.S.Ramamirtham has succeeded in utilizing the language that best suits stream-of-consciousness technique.

Modern novel is a plume in the hands of an eminent writer and treasure in the hands of readers. A piece of such a value calls forth an arbitrary assessment. Yet, it is not always an easy task. Every writer is at his best with his pen when he chooses to write down. But the factual success of him rests only when he finishes. He seeks to have liberties in between; there lies his task of involving to conventional modes. Every literary work follows this, sometimes goes against. These pros and cons are liable to accept in an assessment. Such a conviction applies to all literary evaluations. Society faces rapid changes in its system. One can observe these changes as much as a winter tends to observe. These changes make him get the means of artistic anatomy. As literary history of any country tells, such changes are mere adherence to the literary belief that literature is a reflection of life.

Tamil novel encompasses many such aspects. In every writer, one can note how he had utilized the opportunity of gathering literary movements. In such a tradition, a slightly popular way of writing came to Tamil novel. That is called “Stream-of-consciousness”. A few novels in Tamil got based on this technique. Some survived and yet others left unnoticed. Under this, L.S.Ramamirtham survived to be read. His novels *Puthra* and *Abitha* are meant to have written basically on this stream-of-consciousness technique. The fact that stream of consciousness plays a prominent room in modern fiction can be understood by various definitions referred to by many volumes:

“Stream-of-Consciousness, in literature, technique that records the multifarious thoughts and feelings of a character without regard to logical argument or narrative sequence. The writer attempts by the stream-of-consciousness to reflect all the forces, external and internal, influencing the psychology of a character of a single moment” (Encyclopaedia 6511)

The following definition does neatly clarify the complexities involved in the understanding of the term:

“... Stream-of-consciousness is often confused with interior monologue, but the latter technique projects the sensations of the mind into a more formal pattern, a flow of thoughts inwardly expressed, that is similar to a soliloquy. The technique of Stream-of-Consciousness, however, attempts to portray the remote, inner-state consciousness that exists before the mind organizes sensations. Consequently, the portrayal of stream-of-consciousness frequently lacks the unity explicit cohesion, and selectivity of direct thought” (Wagnell 382).

The origin of stream-of-consciousness goes back to the novels of Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Proust. The descent of this had been rightly filled by Virginia Woolf who made the frequent use of the technique, especially in Mrs. Dalloway and *To the Lighthouse*. This type of technique was used, first, to convey all the contents of a character’s mind-memory, sense, perceptions, feelings, intuitions, thoughts – in relation to the stream of experience as it passes by, often at random. Conductively tracing the origin of this type of fiction as a ‘new and radical development from the subjectivism of the well-made novel’, J.W. Beach finds the enormous use of this technique and exemplification of it in the works of Joyce and Dorothy Richardson. Highlighting the peculiar aspects of the technique by his study of twentieth century novels, Beach writes:

“Its (the stream-of-consciousness novels) defining feature is exploitation of the element of incoherence in our conscious process” (P 517).

The phrase ‘stream-of-consciousness’ was taken over, first, it seems, by Mary Sinclair in 1918, reviewing Dorothy Richardson’s novels - to denote the new method of rendering consciousness in itself as it flows from moment to moment a method used with varying degrees of intensity by Dorothy Richardson, Joyce and Virginia Woolf. After Joyce and Virginia Woolf, it no longer took the sport in the fiction then it did in the past. Virginia Woolf took it upon herself to speak for her followers in **Mr. Bennet** and **Mrs. Brown**. The distinctive of

quality of the novelist, according to her, is a permanent interest in 'character' itself. Leon Eden elaborates the tenacious features of the stream-of-consciousness technique. In his book, '*The Psychological Novel*', he traces the origin of stream-of-consciousness novel thus:

"... between 1913 and 1915 was born the modern psychological novel - what we have come to call in English letters, the stream-of-consciousness novel or the novel of the silent, the internal monologue and in French letters, the modern analytic novel, which, of not written as flowing thought, sought the very atmosphere of the mind" (P11).

In his view, the stream-of-consciousness technique had almost shifted the trend of modern fiction. According to him, due to the outcome of this technique, the trend turned fiction away from external to internal reality from the outer world. William James termed the phase 'stream-of-consciousness' as the one for describing the flux of the mind, its continuity and yet its continuous change. William James remarks:

"Consciousness is an amalgam of all that we have experienced and continue to experience. Every thought is a personal consciousness; every situation in our thoughts, selectively attentive, focusing attention on certain objects and areas of experience, rejecting others, totally blocking others out". (P 19).

The stream-of-consciousness narration is otherwise called a paraphrase of the consciousness of a single character. The novelist may resort to a single or multiple choice of his character. In the evolution of consciousness, sometimes, feelings and thoughts appear as images or through symbols. The occurrence of images throws the light to have the technical liberties such as multiple view, slow-ups, editing, panoramic view and point of view. The representation of 'symbols' is considered as one of the basic functions of the human mind. By symbolic representation, it is meant that an illustration of an ordinary thought, is done in an indirect way. Usually, symbols are used to show the inner being and the reality of the character's thought. The stream-of-consciousness novelist relies upon the conditions of poetry because he has only one medium with him, by which he has to create his work. The novelist uses his words, as the painter uses colours and the musician sound. He uses the words to supply the very iridescence and bloom of life. At times, he frames, in syllables the light and the dark moments of memory and feeling. The novelist who attempts to create the illusion of a mind flowing with thought and image and impression turns to be a symbolic poet. With the belief that it is his task to make the fitting word for the relevant thought, the novelist calls upon the devices of prosody and exploits the resources of the language by employing all figurative elements in treatment of theme and technique. The figurative elements that constitute the stream-of-consciousness novels are thus meted out to apply them in L.S.Ramamirtham's *Abitha*.

Abitha is, no doubt, an experimental novel in stream-of-consciousness. Like a play, which comprises Acts, scenes, dialogues, poetry, climax and an end, and like the poetry,

which has form, rhythm, metre, syntax and diction and so on, the fiction too has its own creative tenet. At formative level in drama, there are tragedy, comedy, melodrama; in poetry; there are lyric poetry, epic poetry, romantic poetry, and New poetry; in fiction, there are social novels, historical novels, Epistolary novels and science fiction. Whatever may be the form of the fiction, the novelist, while writing, resorts at his best to various techniques. Among those techniques is the one, stream-of-consciousness. *Abitha* is a stream-of-consciousness novel which deserves considerable analysis and critical evaluation.

The stream-of-consciousness is an expression of the psyche of a character at the moment of the flow of his thoughts. It can also be used to express the psychological conflict of a character. In *Abitha*, the latter sounds more. In consciousness, two levels of thoughts occur depending upon the events: i) speech level and ii) pre-speech level. Of these two, pre-speech level thoughts are mostly expressed in the stream-of-consciousness novels. Yet there is always a traceable part lying where both these levels have been widely used. In *Abitha*, both these levels are expressed in a derivative effort. Here in this novel, Ambi's consciousness has been shown flowing through a stream of his past and present intermittently. The frontier that delinks his past and present or the two levels of speech is the conflict that marks for the psychological aberration in him. To Ambi, there appears two levels – illusory or dream and real. He could not find or place himself in either of these two-fold process of his consciousness. He sees Abitha and immediately thinks of Sakuntalai and yet could not find who is real in his consciousness. To further his will, his vision of all the external appearances before him makes him go for the illusion of living with Sakuntalai. His flow of thought on past events are instigated by the external objects; Karadihill, clouds, Kannikkulam, Thiruvellanathar temple. For the present, the instigator is the very appearance of Abitha.

In *Abitha*, the flow of transcendent consciousness has been expressed by various terms. Experience of thought, conflicts, spiritual experiences, utter feelings, the very appearance of his vision of objects, imaginary scenes, dialogues of aptness, symbols and images. Of the above, Ambi's experiences of thought – past and present are a result of his thrill over his curiosity to see Sakuntalai. He comes with a lot of hope and expectations and procures an imaginary reaction to Sakuntalai's look at him. (Abitha 31-32). Ambi could not come into terms with his present until and unless he is declined to other things. His immediate immersion on his illusion at the very sight of Abitha at the temple mobilizes his remembrance of Sakuntalai, and forms a misty atmosphere to his mind. At this particular moment, he forgets everything and involves in recollecting those moments when he and Sakuntalai were together. (Abitha 33). The novelist shows the transcendent consciousness of Ambi while focusing the conflict germinated by Ambi's sense of abnormal sexual instinct at the sight of Abitha. The conflicting nature of Ambi's mind has been brought to our consciousness through three important ways; i) sexual abnormality ii) guilt-consciousness and self-frustration and iii) mother-fixation. The very atmosphere of the novel is based on Ambi's conflict evoked by that sexual abnormality. But the novelist presents these conflicts not through Ambi's self;

rather through Ambi's response to the external objects. Ambi's vision of the stars as the semen of the sky, his study of whistling air's sexual fulfillment through the holes of leaves, his vision of clouds as the strewn flowers at the bridal – bed – all these are not mere descriptions of external objects, but what comes from Ambi's deep consciousness (Abitha 48). All these are pre-meet of him with Abitha. After his meeting with Abitha, his condition has been furthered that the conflict touches the danger point. His struggle and bitter experiences at the vision of Abitha as the replica of Sakuntalai has been narrated with pure stream-of-consciousness (Abitha 60).

Ambi feels that he was responsible for the demised state of Sakuntalai and this also adds a fuel to fire, while he listens to Abitha's words about her mother. Yet he waxes his guilt consciousness through his vision of rainy-roof, which drops water (Abitha 12). In another occasion, he feels guilty of dismantling the place where Savitri was not there and finds fault with her (P 94). A slightly modified type of mother-fixation also happens in Ambi's consciousness. His mind has drawn an irremovable layer of his mother's fatal state in early life. At times when he feels that he had been left unnoticed in this world, he takes asylum in his reminiscence of her. As he indulges in a sensual approach to Abitha's appearance, he pictures the Karadihillas his mother and finds himself and Abitha as living in the womb (Abitha 53). The novelist uses this mother-image only to save Ambi from his conflict that happens in his mind. The directives of the deep consciousness produce some kind of spiritual meaning in Ambi. It is true that he sees Abitha as a replica of Sakuntalai and thinks of enjoying his moments with her. But at the spiritual level, he visualizes Abitha as an enshrine of Goddess Ambigai. He even finds his

wife as enshrined in Abitha. At this staggering moment, he understands the process of Goddess's resemblance as Sakuntalai – Abitha – Ambigai (PP 104-105).

The novelist employs images and symbols as an expression of the transient consciousness of a particular moment of crisis. The image of music comes to Ambi's mind when he queries about Sakuntalai "How would be Sakku?" In accordance with this, the notation of music, Raga, Thala and Pallavi begins to form. With this series the suras, "pathathaninithathamaSamakasa" occurs in his mind. In all these suras, he finds so many Sakuntalais and so many Abithas. This music-image develops to form the active images that heightens his understanding. In this novels, symbols have been used rather enormously notwithstanding to indicate any special references. But on many situations where the emotions and feelings come from his consciousness, the situations so created themselves become symbols. The symbol of Kannikulam serves a twin purpose in his mind. One is the embodiment of his dead mother's affection; it is from the sight of this pond and an illusion of it as the womb of his mother that gives him some solace. Also at the spiritual level, it serves for him as a pond which cannot be molested by any source or any force. It is this understanding that makes him think of this pond as nothing but the embodiment of Abitha herself. Of the important devices of the stream-of-consciousness technique, only the internal monologue has been fully exploited in the novel. Still, the internal monologue is direct in its way, for, the novel employs only the single point of view – Ambi's consciousness. L.S.Ramamirtham has succeeded in utilizing the language that best suits stream-of-consciousness technique

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